

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION INR-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 PM-05
NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 DODE-00 ISO-00 /070 W
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P R 230617Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7411
INFO AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 0874

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ETRN, ENGR, PBOR, ET, UR, SO
SUBJ: ETHIOPIAN PETROLEUM SITUATION: SOVIET INITIATIVES

REF: STATE 010317 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: FIRST ATTACK IN NEARLY FIVE MONTHS BY INSURGENTS
ON ASSAB-ADDIS ABABA ROAD DESTROYS SEVEN FUEL TRUCK/TANKERS.
STRAIN ON FUEL SUPPLIES DURING RECENT ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE
HAS NOW BEEN ALLEVIATED, PARTLY THROUGH COMMUNIST SUPPLY
SOURCES. WHAT APPEARS TO BE GROWING ETHIOPIAN DEPENDENCE
UPON SOVIET PETROLEUM COULD ENHANCE SUSPECTED SOVIET DESIGNS
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TO DETERMINE ETHIOPIAN WAR POLICY. THIS CONCEIVABLY COULD
BE TO PROLONG THE WAR, THEREBY GAINING TIME FOR EFFORTS TO
ESTABLISH PUPPET REGIMES IN ERITREA AND SOMALIA, AND TO CON-
SOLIDATE THEIR GROWING PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN ADDIS ABABA.
END SUMMARY.

1. RAID ON TRUCK CONVOY. ON FEB 13 INSURGENTS ATTACKED AN

ETHIOPIAN TRUCK CONVOY ON THE ASSAB TO ADDIS ABABA RUN. AS REPORTED BY INDUSTRY SOURCES, FIVE FUEL TRUCK/TANKERS WERE DESTROYED AND SEVERAL OTHERS DAMAGED (TWO OF WHICH ARE NOT REPAIRABLE). THE ATTACK TOOK PLACE SOME 38 KILOMETERS OUTSIDE OF ASSAB. IT IS BELIEVED THE INSURGENTS WERE AFARS WHO FLED BACK INTO DJIBOUTI FOLLOWING THEIR SUCCESSFUL ATTACK. THIS WAS THE FIRST SUCH INCIDENT ON THE ASSAB-ADDIS ABABA ROAD IN SOME FIVE MONTHS.

2. FUEL SITUATION. INFORMED SOURCES STATE THAT UNUSUALLY HIGH DEMAND PLACED A SEVERE STRAIN ON THE SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION OF FUEL SOME TWO-THREE WEEKS AGO (AT THE TIME OF THE LAST SIGNIFICANT ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE). WHILE THE LEVEL OF IMPORTS SUPPLIED BY WESTERN PETROLEUM COMPANIES AT THIS TIME CHANGED LITTLE, THERE WERE SIGNIFICANT IMPORTS OF ADDITIONAL FUEL, PRIMARILY JET A, FROM COMMUNIST SOURCES. DESPITE THE ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES, AND ALMOST A COMPLETE DRAW DOWN FROM DOMESTIC STORAGE FACILITIES, INDICATIONS ARE THAT ETHIOPIA'S MILITARY NEEDS WERE STILL NOT FULLY MET. THIS SITUATION DRASTICALLY CHANGED ABOUT A WEEK AGO AND THE COUNTRY'S LIMITED STORAGE FACILITIES ARE AGAIN NEARLY FULL. IN PLACES, THE OFF LOADING OF SOME FUEL TRUCK/TANKERS IS DELAYED DUE TO THE INADEQUACY OF STORAGE FACILITIES. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE QUICK RE-BUILDUP OF FUEL SUPPLIES IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO INCREASING IMPORTS FROM COMMUNIST SOURCES.

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3. FUEL STORAGE FACILITIES. WHILE THE FUEL DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM NOW SEEMS ADEQUATE TO COPE WITH NORMAL (I.E., LEVEL OVER THE PAST THREE MONTHS) AND EVEN SLIGHTLY HIGHER DEMANDS, THE LACK OF STORAGE FACILITIES CONTINUES TO BE A MAJOR PROBLEM. DURING TIMES OF REDUCED DEMAND, WHEN THE LIMITED STORAGE CAPACITY IS FULL, THE TRUCK/TANKERS PERFORCE BECOME TEMPORARY STORAGE CONTAINERS AS THEY WAIT TO OFFLOAD. THIS INCREASES TURNAROUND TIME AND REDUCES THE AMOUNT OF FUEL TRANSFERRED FROM ASSAB INLAND. IN TIMES OF VERY HIGH DEMAND, THE TRUCK FLEET IS HARD PRESSED TO KEEP UP. REPORTEDLY, ADDITIONAL STORAGE FACILITIES AT ASSAB, AWASH AND OTHER (AS YET UNKNOWN) LOCATIONS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

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4. SUPPLIERS OF FUEL. WESTERN FIRMS CONTINUE TO BE THE MAJOR SOURCE OF ETHIOPIA'S PETROLEUM IMPORTS, BUT REPRESENTATIVES SUGGEST THERE IS SOME FEAR THIS MAY BE CHANGING. IN A FEW INSTANCES RECENTLY, THEIR SHIPS HAVE HAD TO STAND BY WHILE FUEL TANKERS FROM THE COMMUNIST WORLD HAVE BEEN UNLOADED. OF FURTHER CONCERN IS THE EPMG'S CANCELLATION OF SOME WESTERN SHIPMENTS OF JET B FUEL PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED FOR MID-MARCH DELIVERY. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THUS FAR THE EPMG HAS PROMPTLY MET ALL FUEL BILLS PRESENTED BY THE WESTERN PETROLEUM FIRMS. INFORMED SOURCES BELIEVE THE JET A FUEL IMPORTED FROM COMMUNIST SOURCES IS COMING DIRECTLY FROM THE USSR VIA THE BLACK SEA AND THE SUEZ CANAL. THIS BELIEF IS BASED ON THE FACT THAT THE FUEL IS BELOW INTERNATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS.

5. COMMENT: THE WORST POSSIBLE SCENARIO SUGGESTED BY THE FOREGOING INFORMATION FORESEES A GROWING ETHIOPIAN DEPENDENCE UPON THE SOVIETS FOR FUEL, WHICH THEY CAN RESTRICT IN ORDER TO DRAG OUT THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST SOMALIA, AND TO FORESTALL ANY OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA. IN SO DOING, THE SOVIETS GAIN NEEDED TIME TO ATTEMPT TO SET UP PUPPET REGIMES IN ERITREA AND SOMALIA, AND TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR EVER GROWING PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN ADDIS ABABA. SHOULD THIS BE EVEN APPROXIMATELY THE SOVIET DESIGN, AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS TO THIS EFFECT, OCCASIONAL LIMITED SUCCESS BY SOMALIA IS TO THE KREMLIN'S ADVANTAGE. IN CONTRAST, A QUICK SOMALIA WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OGADEN AND NEGOTIATION EFFORTS BETWEEN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA, WITH THE HEAVY INVOLVEMENT

OF THE OAU, IS PROBABLY THE LAST THING MOSCOW WOULD LIKE TO
SEE.
MATHERON

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